



News Release

For Immediate Release
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Influenza Cases Now Reported in Four Utah Counties

(Salt Lake City, UT) - Influenza continues to hit the Wasatch Front early this season. As of Wednesday, 86 influenza cases have been reported to the Utah Department of Health (UDOH), all type A. The cases range in age from 1 month to 86 years, the majority (66%) are under age 5, and 18 people have been hospitalized. Cases have been reported in Salt Lake (81), Summit (1), Wasatch (1) and Utah (3) counties. Of the 86 cases, 65 have been laboratory-confirmed; 21 cases were diagnosed through rapid testing.

Utah's flu season typically runs from November through March with most cases occurring in January and February. During the 2002-2003 influenza season, influenza cases were not reported until mid-December and the total case count for the season was 353 cases. The UDOH tracks influenza (flu) activity by reports of patients diagnosed with influenza (laboratory-confirmed), reports of patients with influenza-like symptoms (clinically diagnosed), by monitoring absenteeism at schools throughout the state and by monitoring the rates of influenza-like illness at 38 sentinel healthcare clinics.

It is not too late to be vaccinated. There is still plenty of influenza vaccine available. The UDOH encourages health care providers to continue vaccinating through December or later, as long as vaccine is available. It takes about two weeks after vaccination to develop protection. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved a new nasal spray influenza vaccine (Flu Mist) for healthy persons aged 5-49 years of age. Not all clinics have Flu Mist available.

Some groups of people are more likely to become seriously ill from influenza. Influenza vaccination is most important for people in those high-risk groups, which include:

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- Healthy children from 6 to 23 months of age
- People over the age of 50, especially those with chronic conditions
- Those with chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, heart disease, or those with suppressed immune systems (such as cancer patients or those with AIDS)
- Those living in long-term care facilities
- Healthcare workers
- Women who will be more than three months pregnant during flu season
- Household contacts and others who can transmit influenza to those at high risk

Children under 9 years of age who receive vaccine for the first time need a booster dose one month after the first dose. Parents should check with their health care provider to discuss annual influenza vaccination of healthy children. The cost of the vaccine may be covered by the Vaccines for Children Program for eligible children up to age 18.

Vaccination is the single most important thing you can do to protect yourself from influenza. Hand washing, when done correctly, can also help prevent the spread of influenza. There is more to hand washing than you think! By rubbing your hands vigorously with soapy water, for at least ten seconds, you pull the dirt plus the oily soils free from your skin and wash them away.

If you think you have influenza (abrupt onset of fever, muscle aches and pains, cough and or sore throat), you may want to consult your physician within 24 hours. Prescription antiviral medications can reduce the duration of flu by about one day if taken within two days of when symptoms begin. If you get the flu, you should rest, drink plenty of liquids, avoid using alcohol and tobacco, and take medication to relieve the symptoms of flu.

For more information on where to get the influenza vaccine or the Vaccines for Children Program, contact your health care provider, local health department or call the Utah Immunization Hotline at 1-800-275-0659.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.